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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 MASERU 000357

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TAGS: [KDEM](#) [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [LT](#)
SUBJECT: LESOTHO: SADC ENVOY BRINGS GOL, OPPOSITION TOGETHER

REF: A) MASERU 350 AND PREVIOUS; B) MASERU 355

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CLASSIFIED BY: Charge d'Affaires a.i. W. Patrick Murphy, CDA
a.i., EXEC, DOS.
REASON: 1.4 (b), (d)
[1](#)1. (C) SUMMARY: On June 16, former President of Botswana Kitumile Masire, head of a SADC mediation team in Lesotho, succeeded in pulling together various stakeholders, including the governing and opposition parties, to discuss the nation's current political stalemate. Masire achieved an agreement for a formal dialogue, commencing on June 25, to discuss political tolerance and respect and to review Lesotho's electoral system and parliamentary seat allocation procedures. The joint session was generally amicable, according to Lesotho's Foreign Minister, but not without some verbal fireworks. Masire's success in herding the parties together for the first time since the post-election impasse emerged in February provides substantial hope for reconciliation. The present deteriorating security situation in Lesotho (ref A) gives his mission an increasingly weighty sense of urgency and importance. The governing and opposition parties, however, diverge considerably on expectations of the results the dialogue may produce. Masire and his SADC mediation team will have their work cut out for them. END SUMMARY.

SADC Troika Dialogue

[1](#)2. (U) Former President of Botswana Sir Kitumile Masire visited Lesotho June 14-18 as an "eminent person" assigned by the SADC Organ of Politics, Defense, and Security Cooperation Ministerial Troika to mediate among stakeholders in the nation's current political standoff (ref A). His effort is a follow-up to the conclusions of the SADC Troika's earlier mission to Lesotho in April 2007, which recommended that a formal political dialogue be initiated to resolve the country's post-electoral political impasse which has raised concerns about the country's stability.

Read Out From Foreign Minister

[1](#)3. (SBU) During a June 18 meeting between the Deputy Prime Minister and diplomatic representatives regarding an ongoing curfew and security deterioration (ref B), Foreign Minister Tsekoa briefed on Masire's mediation visit. Noting that "time

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is not on our side," Tsekoa said that the GOL treated the mediation process seriously and as a means to help resolve the country's political impasse. The FM said that Masire had met with all target stakeholders during his visit, including the

governing LCD party, opposition parties, the nation's media monitoring panel, the Lesotho Council of NGO's, and the diplomatic corps (ref A), among others. On Saturday, June 16, Masire met jointly with all stakeholders, reversing his earlier decision that a joint session between the LCD and the opposition would be counterproductive. (NOTE: The UN Resident Coordinator (UNRC) told Charge that Masire had contacted her to report that during his consultations he had discovered enough commonalities among stakeholders to conclude that a mediation session during his first visit could in fact yield tangible results. END NOTE.)

14. (SBU) Masire, according to FM Tsekoa, tabled two issues during the Saturday mediation session: 1) the need to conduct a dialogue on basic political ground rules including political tolerance, respect for authority, and respect for other political players; and 2) the need to bring in "outside" (international) experts to discuss and evaluate Lesotho's Mixed Member Proportional (MMP) electoral model and the allocation of parliamentary seats. On the first issue, opposition figures stated that they would need time to prepare for such a dialogue, but agreed to address it upon President Masire's return to Lesotho on Monday June 25 to resume the mediation effort. (NOTE: Tsekoa expressed surprise that the opposition would need time to

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prepare for issues as fundamental as mutual respect. END NOTE.)

15. (SBU) After some debate, said FM Tsekoa, the session's participants agreed to bring foreign technical experts to Lesotho to discuss the MMP model. Tsokoa was quick to point out the divergence of expectations between the governing and opposition parties regarding the outcome of these experts' recommendations. Opposition parties foresee a process that results in their gain of more parliamentary seats, while the governing party sees the seat distribution as a purely legal issue that must be settled through the courts with effect only on future elections.

16. (SBU) FM Tsekoa stated that he did not see an overlap between current court cases on seat allocation and the work of international experts on the MMP model, as the latter would merely produce recommendations that are not legally binding. He added that President Masire had responded emphatically to the opposition parties that the technical experts would offer views, but only "the law of the land" could change electoral procedures. All sides, concluded Tsekoa, agreed that while the

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political parties could suggest specific technical experts, President Masire would make the actual nominations on the basis of a stakeholder consensus that "the best available experts" needed to be identified.

17. (U) In a letter dated June 18 to the UNRC expressing gratitude for UNDP funding of the "SADC Mediation Mission," and seeking additional resources for the next stage, FM Tsokoa said that Masire had "successfully facilitated a preliminary post-electoral dialogue between Government and Opposition Parties and other stakeholders," reaching agreement on an agenda and on starting the "main dialogue" on June 25. A June 17 SADC press release said that Masire, who commended the stakeholders for their willingness to engage in a dialogue to resolve their differences, had "expressed the importance of promoting a culture of dialogue and good governance that allows for sustainable peace and security in Lesotho."

The Opposition Weighs In

18. (SBU) On June 19, five of Lesotho's main opposition parties, led by ABC leader (and former LCD Minister) Tom Thabane, held a press conference to address the Masire mediation mission. The parties, affirming they had agreed with the SADC Troika's recommendation to hold further dialogue to discuss issues related to parliamentary seat allocation, identified publicly

the specific experts they would like to see study Lesotho's MMP model. The opposition leaders also noted disapprovingly that Tanzanian FM Membe, during his delivery to Lesotho on June 11 of the SADC Troika report, has assiduously avoided any discussion of the allocation of proportional parliamentary seats - the opposition's main bone of contention. (NOTE: Thabane told several diplomats separately that he was "pleased" with the Masire mediation, saying that the opposition had submitted a number of key issues for the dialogue agenda, including party alliances, official opposition leader status, and personal security. "Masire was hard on us," said Thabane, "but he was hard on the LCD, too."

Gains Despite Fireworks

16. (C) COMMENT: The Foreign Minister characterized the mediation session as generally amicable, but not without some verbal fireworks between the governing and opposition parties. Nonetheless, Masire's success in herding the parties together for the first time since the post-election impasse emerged in February provides substantial hope for reconciliation and a return to normalcy. The present deteriorating security situation in Lesotho (ref A) has given his mission an increasingly weighty sense of urgency and importance. The governing and opposition parties, however, diverge considerably on expectations of the results the dialogue may produce. Masire and his SADC mediation team will have their work cut out for them. END COMMENT.
MURPHY